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OPERATION OF THE ANTI TANK PLATOON
2ND BN, 26 INF, 1ST DIV, AT EL ANGOR
8-11 NOVEMBER 1942, ALGERIA-FRENCH MOROCCO CAMPAIGN
(Personal experience of a Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: ANTI TANK PLATOON
AS FLANK SECURITY FOR A BEACH HEAD

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OPERATION OF THE ANTI TANK PLATOON
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the Anti-Tank Platoon, 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry, 1st Division, in the Oran Operation, 8-11 November 1942, during the invasion of North Africa.

Known as "OPERATION TORCH", this invasion of North Africa represented the first aggressive action on a large scale by the Allies in the European Theatre and was the first step toward our goal of eventually invading the continent of Europe itself. General Dwight D. Eisenhower was appointed Commander in Chief Allied Expeditionary Forces on 14 August 1942 and was given the mission of directing this combined military operation at the earliest practicable date, 8 November 1942. (1) To Eisenhower fell the gigantic task of leading the army, navy, and air force of both the United States and Great Britain and moulding them into a single team with a common military objective.

"OPERATION TORCH" was planned and executed at a time when the entire world situation looked serious indeed for the Allied cause. As a matter of fact, it was these critical conditions which necessitated such an operation. The Allies had hoped to be ready for a large scale invasion across the English channel in 1943, but with the Desert Fox Rommel romping across Egypt to Alexandria, the German Wehrmacht hammering at the gates of Stalingrad, and the Allies' all-important sea route of communication seriously

(1) A-5, p. 2

threatened, it was necessary that we make this diversionary attack. It would mean that the major cross channel operation in 1943 would have to be postponed and all efforts devoted to getting "OPERATION TORCH" in shape. (2)

By 20 September 1942, after two different plans had been carefully considered and evaluated, the objectives were decided upon. Three simultaneous landings would be undertaken: CASABLANCA, ORAN, and ALGIERS. (3) (See Map A)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

Because of our many commitments throughout the world, and because the United States' great productive capacity had not yet had time to make itself felt, there was an acute shortage of everything needed for the invasion, trained troops, supplies and equipment, particularly landing craft and shipping. There could be no waiting to amass tremendous amounts of trained troops and equipment because weather conditions, which would contribute greatly to the success or failure of the operation, were expected by expert long-range weather forecasters to become steadily worse beginning in early fall. The invasion had to be made just as soon as a fighting strength could be assembled.

In General Eisenhower's opinion seven weeks before D-Day, our chances for success in the landings were better than even, but the chances for over-all success, including the possibility of advancing into Tunis, were considerably less than fifty percent. (4) From a purely military viewpoint, the risks were too great to undertake such a move, but more

(2) A-2, p. 6 and 38

(3) A-5, p. 7

(4) A-1, p. 93

than military factors alone were involved. There were political aspects of the situation which made it a somewhat better risk. It was hoped that our forces would meet little or no opposition and that the French forces in North Africa would later join us against the Axis. According to the best information available, there would be only a token resistance to the invasion, although this could not be definitely ascertained. Resentment against the British as a result of the Oran, Dakar and Syrian incidents in which British forces had come into open conflict with the French made it necessary that the invasion be made by American forces with no evidence of participation by the British. (6)

In an effort to learn definitely what the French reaction would be, an ultra secret submarine expedition headed by General Mark Clark was made about three weeks before D-Day to confer with French Army representatives. Unfortunately, nothing definite was learned from this trip. (7)

Since we were counting on the almost unopposed landings to help make the invasion a success, it was of the utmost importance that "OPERATION TORCH" be kept highly secret in order that there be no reinforcement of the area by the Axis. Also, although Spain was neutral, her sympathies were pro-Axis and if information reached her concerning the proposed landings, it could mean her involvement in the conflict with most disastrous results for the Allies. (8)

In order to insure this secrecy, a careful cover plan was formulated intended to deceive the enemy agents as to our destination. It would be impossible, of course, to keep completely secret the fact that we were assembling an

(6) A-1, p. 71
(7) A-5, p. 6
(8) A-1, p. 93

invasion force, but we hoped to mislead the enemy into thinking we were planning to attack in the Eastern Mediterranean. (9) Our troops were not told their actual destinations but were lead to believe that they were going around the Cape of Good Hope. Up until 1 November when secrecy was lifted aboard ship, only officers down to battalion level were told the true objective. (10)

After numerous conferences by the Combined Chiefs of Staff and many changes in minor details because of the harrassing shortages, the following set-up was planned for the three landings:

(1) WESTERN TASK FORCE under General George E. Patton, Jr., USA. 35,000 American troops would embark from the United States; landing would be made on the Atlantic coast of French Morocco; mission would be the capture of Casablanca and vicinity.

(2) CENTER TASK FORCE under Major General L. R. Fredendall, USA. 39,000 American troops would leave from England; landing would be made on the Mediterranean coast of Algeria; mission would be the capture of Oran and airfields in the vicinity. (See Annex A)

(3) EASTERN TASK FORCE under Major General C. W. Ryder, USA. 33,000 British and American troops would leave from England; would land on the Mediterranean coast of Algeria; mission would be the capture of the city of Algiers and airfields in the vicinity.

(See Map A)

Naval plans for the operation included a covering force based on Gibraltar to protect from French and Italian Mediterranean fleets, another off the Azores to provide cover for the Casablanca assault, and the three convoys. In one of the greatest armadas of all time, some 173 ships of war from battleships to corvettes were assembled, not counting assault loaders and cargo vessels, hospital ships, landing craft, etc. (11)

(9) A-6, p. 21

(10) Personal knowledge

(11) A-6, p. 10

PLANS OF CENTER TASK FORCE

II CORPS, operating as CENTER TASK FORCE, was comprised of:

1st Division: {CT 16 and 18, "Z FORCE"
{CT 26, "Y FORCE"

Combat Command "B", 1st Armored Division: { "GREEN FORCE"
1st Rangers { "RED FORCE"

2d Bn, 503d Parachute Infantry
various supporting units.

Under the naval command of Admiral Thomas Troubridge, RN, approximately 50 British transports plus a British escort of some 50 naval vessels led by the Battleship HMS Rodney would transport the troops from England to Oran. (See Annex A)

CENTER TASK FORCE would land at H-hour on D-day, 0100 hours, 8 November 1942. In the capture of Oran, plans were made for a reinforced encirclement, with 1st Division forces under the command of Major General Terry Allen, USA, making up the inner circle. "Z FORCE" would land at "Z BEACH" (ARZEU) and attack ORAN from the east. "Y FORCE" would land at "Y BEACH" (LES ANDALOUSES), seize the western heights dominating the city and attack ORAN from the west. Along with these two simultaneous attacks from the east and west, a parachute battalion would be landed at H-hour at LA SENIA AIRPORT to the south of ORAN. Constituting the outer reinforcing circle, "RED FORCE" would land on "Z BEACH" after it was secured, swing to the south and enter ORAN from the southeast. "GREEN FORCE" would land on "X BEACH" (MERSA-BOU-ZEDJAR), secure the beach, and attack ORAN from the southwest.

A task force "RESERVIST" consisting of the 3d Bn, 6th Armored Infantry, was given the mission of executing an attack on the Port of Oran itself and preventing the scuttling

of any merchant ships there at the time. The mission was unsuccessful however; both ships in the task force were sunk by port defenses and most of the men were lost. (13)

From the beginning of September until the middle of October, commanders and staffs who had been informed of "OPERATION TORCH" worked on their plans which had to cover the most minute details. The Division was located at this time in Scotland where the men were continuing to receive training. Although this would be the first actual combat these men had seen, most of them, prior to going to England, had taken part in the amphibious maneuvers held on the eastern coast of the United States. A final amphibious exercise known as "MOSSTROOPER" was undertaken in the locks of Scotland on 18 October, which was intended to duplicate as much as possible the conditions which would be encountered in the invasion itself. On 26 October at 2100 hours the main convoy sailed from Greenock, Scotland. Secrecy was lifted on 1 November and from that time until D-Day, maps and details of the landing were studied intensively by every officer and man. (14)

Although there were no Axis troops reported in the Oran area, Intelligence reports indicated that on D-day there would be not less than 5,500 French troops immediately available and organized as infantry, mechanized cavalry, artillery and supporting units. On D+1, an additional 2,000 could be put into action and by D+5, approximately 12,000 troops could be mustered by the French. (15) (See Annex B)

(13) A-5, p. 11

(14) Personal knowledge

(15) A-6, p. 17

In general they were poorly equipped with only a fair amount of training, but they did have the benefit of professional leadership. The French troops in the Oran and Casablanca areas were expected to resist more than those in the Algiers area. The French navy which was embittered because of the shelling of the French fleet at Oran was reported to have 14 destroyers, 8 submarines, and a battleship based at Oran and ready for action. French coastal batteries were definitely expected to put up a stiff resistance. Their guns were set up protecting the harbor and bay of Oran and were manned by elements of the French Marines. (16)

A special effort was made to take the port facilities of Oran before any demolition work was accomplished, because these facilities would be of vital importance in the logistical support of the invasion troops. A 45-day reserve was to be carried with the invasion and if destruction of the docks could be prevented, they could be used for the unloading of ships bringing in further supplies. (17)

TERRAIN AND CLIMATE

Photographs made by submarines were helpful in determining in advance what type of shoreline could be expected around Oran. It was found that with the exception of three fairly good beaches, the coastal line in the area is made up of rocks rising abruptly from the water and is completely unsuited for landing.

Starting from the easternmost point in the area:

ARZEU BEACH, 25 miles east of ORAN, is the largest and best of the three beaches.

LES ANDALOUSES, 15 miles west of ORAN, situated in a small gulf formed by CAPE LINDLES and CAPE FALCON, the latter having large coastal defense

(16) A-2, p. 58 and 102

(17) A-2, p. 97

guns on its point; a flat beach extending 1,000 yards along the shore and 50 yards inland; opening onto generally flat farming country; about 10 miles inland is a dorsal range extending all the way to ORAN.

MERSA-BOU-ZEDJAR, 30 miles west of ORAN, located at CAPE FIGALO.

ORAN is the second largest city in French North Africa with a pre-war population of 200,000. Forming a semi-circle around the city on the western and southwestern sides is a large group of mountainous hills. Overlooking the city and one of the highest of the group is DJEBEL MURDJADJO, some 2,000 feet in height. The SEBKRA is a salt marsh which was expected to be covered with about two feet of water at this time. (18) (See Map B)

It was expected that the weather at this time of year would be rainy with moderately cool temperatures. The chances were estimated to be four to one in favor of finding practicable landing conditions. (19)

DISPOSITION AND PLANS OF REGIMENT AND BATTALION

CT 26 was under the command of Brigadier General Teddy Roosevelt until after the landing had been completed and communication facilities established ashore. The Commanding Officer of the Regiment was Colonel Aleck N. Stark, Jr. According to the plans for the landing, 3d Battalion would land on "Y WHITE BEACH" on the left of 2nd Battalion and would take the town of BOU SPER. It would then drive toward ORAN, first taking the heights of DJEBEL MURDJADJO west of ORAN. 2nd Battalion, less G Company, would land on "Y GREEN BEACH" simultaneously with 3rd Battalion and proceed to its objective, AINE EL TURK. After clearing AINE EL TURK it was to drive northward toward CAPE FALCON and capture the coastal

(18) A-6, p. 12

(19) A-2, p. 86

defense guns located there. 1st Battalion would land in reserve and would follow 3d Battalion unless otherwise ordered. (20) (See Map B)

G Company, with the 2d Battalion Anti Tank Platoon attached, was to land, re-organize, and strike southwest to EL ANCOR. After the capture of EL ANCOR communication wires leading out of the town were to be cut. With the assistance of the anti tank platoon it would then organize a defensive position astride a road leading southwest from EL ANCOR and protect the rear of CT 26. (21)

SITUATION OF ANTI TANK PLATOON

On 19 October 1942 the Battalion Commander and S-3 ordered the 2d Battalion Anti Tank Platoon from its location at Inveraray, Scotland, to a small staging area just outside of Greenock, Scotland. Prior to leaving the Battalion, the 2d Battalion Anti Tank Platoon Leader was informed that a landing would be made; destination of the landing was not given. A sketch of the route that the platoon would take upon arrival at the beach to the objective was given. No other information was given and the platoon leader was instructed that none of this information was to be passed along to the men until he received word while on the ship to do so. Sealed orders containing complete details of the landing would be given to the platoon leader aboard ship. (22)

At the staging area the main effort of the whole platoon was put in water-proofing the 4 quarter-ton vehicles and the four 37-mm. guns that were to be carried in the invasion. Clothing and other equipment was checked and replaced or brought up to standard. After remaining in the staging area

(20) A-6, p. 16

(21) A-4 and personal knowledge

(22) Personal knowledge

for two days, the platoon was ordered on a British freighter named HMS Clan MacTaggart. This freighter carried, in addition to the anti tank platoon, great quantities of ammunition and other vehicles which were to be used by CT 26.

The platoon was at full strength, 36 men and one officer. The platoon was well trained in the use of the 37-mm. gun with which it was equipped, and having received extensive training both in the United States and England, was at the peak of efficiency at this time. The average length of time the men had been in this platoon was about four years. (23)

On 21 September the convoy of which this ship was a part, sailed from Greenock, Scotland. This convoy was made up of supply ships which were much slower than the transports which carried the main body of troops. Therefore, to keep from slowing down the faster ships, this convoy left earlier and it was planned that the faster ships would overtake it and both convoys would unite on the Mediterranean side of Gibraltar. (24)

PLANS OF THE ANTI TANK PLATOON

At noon of 1 November 1942 the platoon leader was directed to report to the captain of the freighter in his cabin. At this time sealed orders were received containing the following information: mission of the platoon, place of landing, the password ("HI HO SILVER") and the countersign ("AWAY"), a sketch of the route to the objective, a submarine photograph of the shore line and instructions that the anti tank platoon would be attached to G Company, 2d Battalion (this was the first knowledge on the part of the platoon leader that the platoon would be attached to G Company), and

(23) Personal knowledge

(24) Personal knowledge

instructions to report to the Company Commander of G Company at the CP at EL ANCOR as soon as possible after landing.

There was no information given as to the terrain in and around the objective, expected weather conditions or phase of the moon at the time of the landing. No information was given as to the expected strength of the enemy although it was stated that the landing probably would be unopposed and the men were to be instructed not to fire unless fired upon.

The mission of the platoon was to establish and secure a road block approximately one half to one mile southwest of EL ANCOR, thus securing the right flank of the beach and protecting the rear of CT 26. The platoon was to land at H+2½ hours on "Y GREEN BEACH" and would follow a route which would insure that if G Company had not reached its objective it would be contacted along this road. (25) (See Map C)

Transportation would consist of two British LCT's which provided the exact amount of room in each to carry two vehicles, two 37-mm. guns and a section of men. The platoon was divided into two sections and while aboard the LCT's the first section would be under the command of the platoon leader and the second section under the command of the platoon sergeant. The boats were carried one on each side of the freighter and were to be launched a few miles from shore just prior to their use. Upon completion of the launching and loading of both LC boats, they were to rendezvous in the vicinity of the front of the freighter at about 0200 hours and proceed abreast to the beach to arrive at 0230 hours. After reaching the beach each section was to clear the beach as soon as possible and rendezvous at a point about 300 yards away from the beach and off to the right of a dirt road. There the platoon would assemble and

(25) Personal knowledge

proceed in a column 30 yards between each vehicle and follow the prescribed route. Upon reaching EL ANCOR the platoon leader would report to the Company Commander, G Company, and from there would proceed to the objective.

Due to the lack of knowledge of the terrain, not having access to a map, general areas were given for each gun's position. Prior to taking these positions, however, section leaders were to report to the platoon leader who would be located on the left flank of the road block and receive further instructions concerning the exact location of the gun positions.

Orders were given not to fire unless fired upon. Each man was instructed to load and lock his individual weapon. (26)

FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE ACTION

The morning of 7 November 1942 was spent in checking all vehicles to be used in the invasion. The vehicles had previously been combat loaded, each having 100 rounds of 37-mm. ammunition (70 AP and 30 HE), two 5-gallon cans of water, a full tank of gasoline plus two 5-gallon cans, and two cases of C rations. The vehicles were also checked to see that all water-proofing was still in good shape, radiator full, all tires on the vehicles and guns in good shape, and minor adjustments made on tuning up the vehicles.

The afternoon was spent in checking the men's equipment and issuing rations. Each man received two days' D ration and one day's C ration, and in addition carried two canteens of water, two bandoliers and a rifle belt of ammunition, mess equipment, necessary personal toilet articles and additional clothing. Water-proofed gas masks were also carried. The total amount that each man carried was approximately 48 pounds.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in checking to see that each man knew the route to the objective, the password

(26) Personal knowledge

and countersign, the tentative position of his 37-mm. gun and understood that he was not to fire unless fired upon.

The platoon leader gave the platoon sergeant instructions that the men would be awakened at 0030 hours, 8 November, and served a hot meal. At 0130 hours the men were to be up on deck and ready to assist in loading the LC boats and then board the boats themselves. Any last minute instructions would be given at this time. (27)

NARRATION

PREPARATIONS FOR LANDING

At 0030 hours, 8 November 1942, the platoon leader went below to the living quarters of the men and checked with the platoon sergeant, Sgt. Lapham, to see that all men had been awakened. They had been awakened and the majority of the men had gone forward and were eating their last hot meal for a long time to come. The platoon sergeant was instructed that the platoon, which was to be split into two sections until after the landing, was to assemble on the port and starboard sides of the freighter beside the nets where they would embark from the freighter to the LC boats. There they would set aside their equipment and await further instructions.

The platoon arrived on the loading deck at 0230 hours, and after unloading their personal equipment were assembled for a final briefing by the platoon leader. After again giving instructions about the landing, covering the most minute details, a short pep talk was given the men. The importance of the mission was emphasized, and the necessity of making a success of the landing was brought out. The men were reminded of the password and countersign and also of the fact that they

(27) Personal knowledge

were not to fire unless fired upon. Although the men were somewhat tense and anxious, they seemed to be looking forward to getting started thus ending the suspense which had been building up since back in Scotland.

Upon contacting the naval captain, it was learned that the freighter would be about a half hour late in reaching the assigned position in the convoy where the LC boats were to be launched. At 0400 hours the captain informed the platoon leader that the freighter had reached its position and that the LC boats would be launched at this point. The night was pitch black with absolutely no moon. The direction of the beach could be ascertained only by the sound of the breaking of waves which could be heard in the silence of the night. There was nothing to indicate that an invasion force had been landed here just a few hours previously. The weather was not cold, but the sea was extremely rough, making it very difficult to launch the LC boats into the water. Finally after about fifteen minutes of manipulation the boats on each side were launched and were tied fore and aft to a large rope which extended completely around the freighter just above water level.

Upon receiving word that the boats had been launched and were tied to the freighter, one squad of men with all their personal equipment boarded each LC boat and assisted in the loading of the vehicles and guns assigned their boat. After completing the loading of the vehicles and guns, the other squad of men went down the rope net and joined the first squad in the boat. (28)

At this time the platoon leader checked to see that both boats were loaded and saw that the one on the starboard side

(28) Personal knowledge

under the command of the platoon sergeant had cast off and was heading forward to the rendezvous area. The LC boats were piloted by Canadian sailors who had taken part as pilots for LC boats in the Dieppe raid. The platoon leader then entered the other LC boat and orders were given to cast off from the freighter. At this time difficulty was encountered in untying the ropes holding the LC boat to the freighter due to the fact that the water had soaked the knots in the ropes. It was difficult to catch hold of these ropes, much less untie them, because the force of the high waves caused the LC boat to sway continuously toward and away from the freighter. Finally, after numerous tries the ropes were cut and the boat headed toward the rendezvous area. (29)

By the time the boat had cast off however, most of the men had already become sea sick and were lying in the bottom of the boat which was covered with water. The motion of the LC boat was much more pronounced than the freighter, and even the excitement of knowing they were beginning the last part of their journey into battle could not distract them as much as their sea sickness. The battle was in the future and the sea sickness was in the present. Gone were the fresh, eager troops of a few minutes before, and in their stead were men who preferred to lay on the wet bottom of the boat rather than make the effort to stand up.

THE LANDING

Contact between the two LC boats was made at the front of the freighter and both boats headed for shore, one abreast of the other and about 50 yards apart. The boat on the right carried the first section and the platoon leader; the boat on the left carried the second section and the platoon

(29) Personal knowledge

sergeant. Since visibility was somewhat less than 20 yards, only occasionally would the boats come close enough together to be seen. Most of the time the only way to tell the position of the other boat was by the muffled noise of its engine. There were still no sounds of fighting from the direction of the beach, and this silence combined with the utter blackness of the night brought up the doubt as to whether the boat was hitting the right beach and whether the other troops had landed. It was a weird, uneasy feeling.

The pilot of the boat to the right, when about half way in to the beach, thought he saw a small foreign craft running parallel to the shore and made a sharp turn out to sea. This maneuver caused it to become lost from the other. The boat on the left slowed down its speed and after approximately five minutes contact was again made. (30)

About 20 yards out from the shore, the boat on the left hit a sandbar but due to the force of the waves was successful in making its way to the shore. The boat on the right also hit a sandbar about 10 yards from the beach and became stuck. It was decided that it could be unloaded from that position. (31)

The men quickly recovered from their attack of sea sickness once within sight of shore. The ramp of each boat was lowered and the vehicles and guns of the first section (gun No. 1 and No. 2) went up the ramp and on to the beach without difficulty. The first vehicle and gun of the second section (gun No. 3) also reached the beach without incident.

However, at the exact moment when the second jeep and gun of the second section (gun No. 4) came off the ramp, a

(30) Personal knowledge

(31) A-6, p. 25

wave hit the rear of the boat causing it to swing almost parallel with the shore and submerging the gun and vehicle in the water up to the top of the radiator of the jeep. The gun was so thoroughly bogged down that the jeep was unable to pull it up on the beach, and it was evident that it would take some little time to free the gun and get it up on shore. It was therefore decided that to avoid delaying the entire platoon, the section leader Sgt. Dutton and the gun crew would remain with this gun to pull it out. They would then proceed to the CP of G Company at EL ANCOR, reporting to the company commander for further instructions concerning the road block.

While the first efforts were being made to free the submerged gun, the platoon leader walked forward to locate the road to the objective. Directly in front of the spot where the landing had been made, approximately 30 yards in from the shore, was a one-story rock house with a dim light in one of the windows. Standing in front of this house was a man wearing a British officer's jacket. (It was later learned that this was the Beachmaster, although the platoon leader had not at any time been informed that there would be such a person on the beach.) The sketch of the route to the objective had long since been thoroughly committed to memory, but in order to make absolutely certain of the location of the dirt road, the platoon leader checked with this officer after asking him the password, and was informed that this dirt road began immediately to the left of the house. The officer stated that it was approximately 75 yards to the black top road which ran parallel to the beach and led in

the direction of EL ANCOR. According to the Beachmaster, the last group had left about thirty minutes before.

Upon arriving at the beach, it had been immediately apparent that the sand was extremely soft with no indication of a firm bottom, so orders were given to unhook the vehicles and guns from each other and the crews assisted in pushing them to the dirt road where they were once again hooked together. The beach was completely barren of evidence of previous landings with the exception of one American canteen which lay on the beach near the water line. There were still no sounds of any fighting to be heard.

Standing near the rock house were a few Arabs dressed in their native costumes. Saying nothing, they stood there with a sort of calm, detached air and watched the landing with a curious, nonchalant gaze. They had probably seen the previous landings and had made up their minds not to be surprised at anything that happened. A pile of discarded gas masks, enough to outfit a company, lying by the side of the dirt road gave positive proof that American troops had indeed been through this area. (32)

After the three jeeps and guns had arrived at the dirt road, much better time was made to the assembly point at the intersection of the dirt road with the black top road. After assembling, the platoon leader gave orders to move over the prescribed route to EL ANCOR. Due to the fact that there was not sufficient transportation to carry all the men, the vehicles proceeded at the same rate as the men on foot. Just outside the town of EL ANCOR dawn began to break on a clear

(32) Personal knowledge

sunshiny day. Sporadic artillery fire could be heard, coming from the vicinity of ORAN and being fired in the direction of the beach.

On reaching EL ANCOR, located about three and a half miles from the beach, contact was made with some soldiers of G Company and directions were asked as to the location of the company CP. On this occasion the password was again used.

The platoon leader was informed that the company CP was at the court house. There the company commander, who was talking with the French mayor of the town at the time, gave the platoon leader instructions to proceed as soon as possible to the road block. No additional instructions were received, and no time was spent before proceeding to the road block.

CONTACT WITH 3RD PLATOON

The platoon proceeded southwest out of town on the road leading to BOU TLELIS. Approximately one mile out of town at about 0800 hours, the 3d Platoon of G Company under the command of Lt. Jack Kirk was contacted. He reported that there had been no enemy contact in the general area although it was thought that there was a French armored unit located in the vicinity of LOURMEL, about 20 miles southwest of EL ANCOR. He also stated that units of the 1st Armored Division that landed at MERSA-BOU-ZEDJAR would make contact with the CT 26 by coming down this road some time before noon. Lt. Kirk oriented the platoon leader as to the location of his troops, giving the general area in which his platoon was extended and the location of one light machine gun and two 60-mm. mortars attached to the 3d Platoon. At this time the

anti tank platoon guns were parked off to the right of the road and in a column with 30 yards between each gun.

The platoon leader with the platoon sergeant made a quick reconnaissance of the area and it was found that the road block was to be located in a small valley about one and a half miles wide. The main and only paved road was a black-top road which extended along the left flank of the plain and led south to BOU TLELIS. On the right flank of the valley was a dirt road with many washes in it and with a two-way concrete bridge just in front of the 3d platoon area. This road extended more or less parallel with the coastline, and via the circuitous route it followed might eventually be connected with the main road running to BOU TLELIS. The ground from the 3d platoon area forward was hilly and sloped gradually forward thus affording good fields of fire in this area. The valley was planted with grape vines about two or three years old which sprawled along the ground unsupported.

SELECTION OF GUN POSITIONS

The platoon sergeant was given orders that gun No. 1 would be placed on top of a small hill to the left and about 200 yards from the main road. This position could cover every spot on this main road until a turn in the road carried it behind a mountain which was about 2,000 yards away.

Gun No. 2 was placed about 300 yards to the right of the main road. This position being in the valley, it did not afford as good a field of fire as gun No. 1, although it was able to cover most of the terrain of the valley. It was also able to cover farther down the road where it gradually curved and went around the mountain.

Gun No. 3 was located in the valley to the right of the secondary road and was about 1500 yards from gun No. 2. It was located on a knoll overlooking the dirt road it was to cover. Due to the height of this knoll it could cover the whole valley except for a few blind spots caused by small arms branching out from a high mountain.

As soon as gun No. 4 arrived, it was to be placed in depth and in a position about 300 yards to the rear of gun No. 3. (See Map C) All these positions were in the close vicinity of the men of the 3d platoon, thus affording an additional protection for these guns. (33)

ACTION AT THE ROAD BLOCK

The three guns proceeded to the designated positions and the men commenced digging in the guns and ammunition. This was approximately 0830 hours. The platoon leader located his CP with gun No. 2, the most centrally located gun position. Instructions were given to the other gun crews that they were not to fire until they heard gun No. 2 commence firing. At the gun position where the platoon leader had located his CP, the jeep was put to the rear in defilade, the ammunition unloaded and holes were being dug. The gun had been hastily dug in and the squad leader was at that time busy having his men dig in the bulk of the ammunition about 20 yards from the gun.

At about 0900 hours, it was observed by the gunner who was on guard at this gun that a column of armored vehicles was coming down the road approximately 1200 yards away. The column consisted of three armored cars, spaced about 20 yards apart, and two motorcycles. The armored cars were

(33) Personal knowledge

proceeding by leap-frogging. Since it was known that a landing was to be made to the right by American armored forces, it was thought that these might be American vehicles. In any event, instructions had been to wait until fired upon. The gun crews and the 3d platoon were alerted and the approach of the armored column observed to see what would happen. Upon approaching within 300 yards, the lead armored car opened up with machine gun fire on some of the troops of the 3d platoon. Immediately, gun No. 2 opened fire. Seeing that this gun had commenced firing, gun No. 3 immediately began firing, getting a direct hit on the lead armored car. The motorcyclists, one located at the rear of the column and the other just ahead of the rear armored car, halted. At this time all three armored cars halted in the road and engaged in the firing. The 37-mm. guns with which the armored cars were equipped quickly picked up the flash of the anti tank guns and took them all under fire. Gun No. 3 took up fire on the motorcyclists but due to the extreme range was unable to hit them. The motorcyclists immediately turned around and headed back in the direction from which they had come.

At this time, 37-mm. fire from the armored cars was being received on each gun of the platoon. A shot from gun No. 1 made another direct hit on the lead armored car, setting it on fire. A moment after this shot was fired, the platoon leader observed what looked like a direct hit on gun No. 1. A shell hit the ground directly in front of this gun, and because no fire was returned by it for a short time, it was thought that casualties had been received.

It was learned later that no casualties had been sustained, due to the armored plate on the gun.

Gun No. 2 continued the fire fight with the remaining vehicles, exchanging from 12 to 15 rounds. A later check disclosed that this gun was shooting high over the target due to the fact that the gun had been damaged in the unloading from the freighter to the LC boat. At the same time, gun No. 3, which was located 1800 yards away, made a direct hit on the rear armored vehicle setting it on fire and thus preventing the middle armored car from going forward or to the rear. It was unable to leave the road because of the deep drainage ditches which ran along both sides of the road.

There were two men with rifle grenades posted within 15 yards of the road. During the engagement they fired a total of approximately 6 rounds, one round hitting the front of the lead vehicle piercing the armored plate and penetrating the motor.

The two burning armored cars and the ammunition exploding inside of them sounded like the firing of a battalion of infantrymen. It was observed at this time that some of the riflemen of the 3d platoon had their rifles up out of their foxholes and were just shooting wildly in the direction of the noise with no specific target.

Finally it was seen that all occupants of the three vehicles were out and on the ground nearby trying to take cover. Orders to cease fire were given and a squad of men from G Company was sent forward with the rest of both platoons covering these men while they went forward. The occupants of the three armored cars, upon seeing that the

firing had stopped and that a patrol was coming in their direction, got up with their hands raised and surrendered. There were 7 French EM and one French officer taken prisoner. Of these 7 EM, one was wounded. In addition, there were 2 killed. All prisoners were evacuated immediately to G Company CP. There were no casualties sustained by any American troops on the road block during this action.

Upon closer inspection, it was determined that these armored cars had two Maxim machine guns plus one 37-mm. gun mounted in each. They appeared to be of an old type and lightly armored with about 3/8" bolted steel-plated armor. (34)

Just previous to the approach of the armored cars, an Arab riding his small native donkey had come up the same road and was located about 100 yards in front of 3d platoon's front lines when the armored cars opened fire. Upon hearing this tremendous unexplained booming noise behind him, the donkey became greatly agitated and scared. Apparently deciding that he could travel faster alone, he threw the Arab and headed for the American lines at full tilt. He had not even reached his top speed when the American guns returned the fire. The donkey, completely losing any presence of mind he might have had, stopped in his tracks, turned and fled just as rapidly back in the direction of the French guns, only to be greeted with another burst from them. He continued this frantic fleeing, first in one direction and then in the other, throughout the engagement. The Arab after recovering from his fall saw his only valuable possession - his entire fortune - running back and forth between the American front lines and the French vehicles, and immediately scrambled madly after him. He

(34) Personal knowledge

pursued his donkey back and forth across no man's land numerous times during the hostilities but could never quite succeed in catching him. After the firing had ceased, the donkey was recovered by an American soldier, whereupon the Arab rushed up and quickly inspected the donkey to see if he had been hurt. It was found upon inspection that the Arab had been creased by three rifle bullets which had penetrated his turban and creased his head. Upon retrieving his donkey, who was unharmed and somewhat calmer, the Arab mounted and went on his way to El Ancor, evidently considering the whole incident as being all in a day's journey.

END OF ACTION

After all men had returned to their respective guns, orders were given that all guns should be dug in deeper and also camouflaged. This would give better protection for the guns and the crews that serviced them if another armored column came up. The trails of the guns had been only hastily dug in on arrival. It was believed that after this first armored column there probably would be an interval in which the platoon could improve the position before any others approached. It was also seen during the engagement that lack of communication between the guns was a distinct disadvantage. Orders were therefore given to install four sound-power telephones within the platoon at once.

At about 1000 the squad which had remained at the beach with gun No. 4 arrived at the platoon CP. Instead of assigning this gun the position on the right flank in support of gun No. 3 as originally planned, it was decided by the platoon leader to place this gun along the main road and in depth about 200 yards to the rear of gun No. 2. It was believed that if any more armor approached this area it

would probably approach along the main road rather than taking the unimproved road on the right flank of the platoon area.

All was quiet on our front. At about 1000 hours the platoon leader, who was standing on the top of a small knoll about 100 yards to the rear of gun No. 2, observed artillery shells falling in the vicinity of the beach at LES ANDALOUSES. Firing was from the coastal batteries located on the high hills in the vicinity of ORAN. The target was the convoy which was anchored approximately five miles from shore unloading supplies. Fire was also received on the LC boats that were carrying the supplies from the freighters to the beach. One LC boat was observed to have received a direct hit. The fire was quite rapid, and the HMS Monarch of Bermuda (the transport which had brought the majority of the men of 2d Battalion from England) received a direct hit aft of the ship. Smoke pots were immediately dropped between the artillery fire and the ship, and within a few minutes the ship pulled farther out to sea. The British battleship HMS Rodney, which was anchored close in to shore with the rest of the convey and which had been firing at other targets in the area, steamed out of the harbor at this time so as to be able to take up fire on these coastal batteries in and around ORAN.

Shortly after noon on D-day a squad of engineers was attached to the 3d platoon of G Company. Its mission was to set demolition charges under the bridge located just forward of gun No. 3. This bridge was not to be blown unless it was seen that enemy armor would use this road. It was to be blown just prior to the time that they would cross the bridge.

During the night of 8-9 November, occasional small arms fire was heard on the right flank. On contacting the gun on the right flank, it was determined that it was quite a distance away. Reports were sent in to the CP of G Company as to this fire.

The engineer on duty at the bridge, at about 0100, 9 November, reported to gun No. 3 that he had heard a noise just on the other side of the bridge and approaching his post. About three members of the gun crew went forward about 20 yards to where the engineer was located. Upon hearing the noise again, they fired 8 rounds of ammunition from each rifle. No further noise was heard, so two of these men went forward to investigate and found a dead dog with about six holes in his hide. By this time both the 3d platoon and the anti tank platoon had been alerted. Upon receiving word that the noise had been a dog, the men went back to sleep except for the security guard.

During the day when the Arab children approached to ask for candy, they would greet us with "HI HO SILVER". They apparently thought that our password was a greeting of some kind and was the proper way to begin a conversation with the American troops. The fact that even the Arab children knew the password made even the privates comment that some precaution had to be taken in using it. (35)

RELIEVED BY REGIMENTAL ANTI TANK COMPANY

At 1100 hours, 10 November, G Company and the anti tank platoon were relieved by Regimental Anti Tank Company and reverted to regimental reserve.

(35) Personal knowledge

The city of ORAN fell at 1230 hours, 10 November. The 2d Battalion, less G Company, had taken its objective, CAPE FALCON, after overcoming stiff resistance from enemy artillery located in the vicinity. After the fall of ORAN, the battalion proceeded to the top of DJEBEL MURDJADJO overlooking the western section of the city. Here at approximately 1430 hours, 10 November, the anti tank platoon joined Headquarters Company, 2d Battalion. (36)

The mission which the anti tank platoon had been assigned had been accomplished. They had protected the right flank of CT 26 near the beach as ordered. During the action at the road block, the platoon was fortunate enough not to have sustained a single casualty. The mishap at the beach involving gun No. 4 luckily did not have serious consequences. The engagement, even though it was brief, provided an excellent example of real warfare for the troops. They had fired approximately 45 rounds of 37-mm. ammunition, and in exchange they could claim credit for 3 armored vehicles. They had made a good score in their first encounter with the enemy.

It would be difficult to estimate the amount of damage the armored column might have caused if it had gotten through the road block. There were at that time no other anti tank guns in the vicinity. If these cars had been able to get through, they would have been free to roam the beach and destroy the urgently needed supplies which were then concentrated there.

The high morale and excellent training of the men had been joined together with experience to form a team which was going to be hard to beat. The lessons learned from this experience, both by the men and the platoon leader, would be

(36) Personal knowledge

of great benefit to them later. The platoon, now made up of "veteran" troops was ready for whatever other missions might be assigned them.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. LACK OF MAPS

In Scotland when the platoon leader was briefed for the first time concerning plans for "OPERATION TORCH", he received a sketch which showed only the roads over which he would move from the beach to the objective. Terrain features, other roads, and any further information which might be helpful in selecting good gun positions were all lacking. It is understood, of course, that due to the extremely secret nature of the operation, a detailed map could not have been given at that time. The platoon leader was informed during this briefing that further information concerning the objective would be given to him with the sealed orders aboard ship. This additional information, however, actually consisted of a photograph taken by a submarine showing the coastline, and a second sketch almost identical with the first one received in Scotland. The photograph gave a good picture of the close-in beach and was helpful in making plans for the landing. The only additional information given by the second sketch, however, was the name of the beach and the fact that the road to be traveled from the beach to the road block would be a black top road.

If maps had been furnished when the sealed orders were received, the platoon could have been given a more thorough orientation, covering the terrain and definite spot locations for the guns. As it was, only tentative gun positions could be assigned, which merely added another unknown to the

many unknown factors involved in any invasion landing of this type.

It was fortunate that the terrain that was to be covered happened to have high mountains on each flank and small intervening hills, thus making it possible to select good gun positions hastily. The fact that there was only one good road in the area narrowed down the enemy's possible avenues of approach to one. The guns could therefore be located so as to concentrate fire on this road.

2. ANTI TANK PLATOON SEPARATED FROM COMPANY TO WHICH ATTACHED

Up until the time the platoon leader received the sealed orders aboard ship, he had not known that the platoon was to be attached to G Company. At that time G Company was located on another ship in the convoy, and coordination concerning plans of G Company and the anti tank platoon was impossible. It was not known what troops, if any, were to be in the vicinity of the road block.

Valuable time was spent on the route to the objective by having to contact the company commander of G Company to obtain any further orders. If both units had been together on the same ship, the anti tank platoon could have proceeded directly to its objective without delaying. It is obvious that if the company commander had not been immediately available when the platoon leader reported, or if he had had numerous detailed instructions to give, the anti tank platoon might have arrived at the objective too late to be able to stop the advance of the armored cars. The time interval between the arrival and setting up of the anti tank guns and the arrival of the armored cars was a very short one - too short for comfort. In addition, the platoon had to engage the enemy from its first hastily prepared position.

3. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ANTI TANK GUNS

These anti tank guns had been fired many times on the ranges in the United States and England. On the range they were found to be very accurate. Targets were the general targets used on any anti tank range. Because the guns were so small in size, the men had some doubt in their mind as to its effectiveness against vehicles which were much larger in size and protected with armor.

At the conclusion of this action many lessons had been learned. The fire delivered by the guns was very accurate. When once fired, however, the flash which occurred was very easily picked up by the enemy and was taken under fire in a surprisingly short time. The technique which would have to be used called for firing as many rounds as possible, just as quickly as possible, so that the enemy could be knocked out immediately before being able to fire at the flash.

Inasmuch as the men had been ordered to hold fire until fired upon, the enemy vehicles had been permitted to approach until within very close range. Gun No. 1 was then able to secure a direct hit on the lead car with its opening round. This was clear proof of the advisability of avoiding prematurely disclosing the gun's position which would give the advantage to the occupants behind the armor.

All guns had been checked before the unloading from the freighter to the LC boat, but it was found during the engagement that gun No. 2 was shooting high over the target. The gun showed no obvious signs of having been damaged, but after the engagement was over, close inspection disclosed that the sight bracket had been bent. Due to the fact that the enemy arrived immediately after the platoon had gotten

into position, there had been no time to check the gun before using it in action. However, had the other guns also been so damaged, it would have been disastrous. The importance of checking the sighting apparatus of the guns cannot be overemphasized. An especially thorough check should be made if the gun has been transported in any manner other than the routine pulling.

4. USEFULNESS OF SOUND-POWER TELEPHONES

The sound-power telephone in a defensive position is essential, and they should be installed as soon as possible after occupying the position. If the telephones had been installed immediately, there would have been better coordination between the guns in the action at the road block. A particular target could have been assigned to each gun, insuring that all targets received the maximum amount of fire. The guns were presented with three targets, and not being coordinated by the platoon leader, the guns had to be responsible for picking their own target. In this case the second armored car was not fired upon until after the lead car had been knocked out.

5. COVER AND CONCEALMENT

At the time the armored column approached, the troops at the road block had not constructed adequate fox holes and the guns had not been camouflaged. The few fox holes that had been dug proved to be so shallow that they did not provide sufficient cover. The only cover that the majority of the men had when they received fire from the enemy was the ground.

The art of camouflage and its importance had been thoroughly stressed in training, yet it had not become second nature to the men as it later did. There were no camouflage

nets or other material available for the camouflage of the guns. These guns could have been dug in, and the mud from the red clay ground could have been smeared on the guns so that they would have blended perfectly with the rest of the terrain. After the action, the platoon leader reminded the members of the platoon to camouflage the guns. The mud was utilized, and the effect observed from about 200 yards distance. From that point, the silhouette of the guns could not be distinguished.

6. USING OF PASSWORD

The choice of "HI HO SILVER" for the password was an especially good one, being an expression familiar to almost every American. It was easily remembered and understood even under the stress and excitement of battle.

The men had been thoroughly briefed to make sure that all of them knew the password. By D-1, it was certain about every man in the platoon. By D+1, it was equally certain that any of the enemy who desired this information also knew our password. In giving the password, the troops failed to give it in a low tone of voice, and on numerous occasions soldiers could be heard in the distance shouting the password. The men were not experienced in combat and they felt the uncertainty of the night a great deal when on duty. Upon hearing the slightest noise they would shout it out, not realizing that by so doing, they were disclosing it to any enemy who might be nearby.

7. SIZE OF THE PLATOON AREA

The road block area, which was about a mile across, was too great an area for a platoon of infantry and a platoon of anti tank guns to cover adequately. Because it was likely

that the enemy would approach on the right side via the better road of the two roads available, the troops had to be disposed so that the great majority of them were on the right flank. This left big gaps in the left flank.

There was no depth to the rifle platoon area or the anti tank platoon area. Gun No. 4 being placed to our rear did give some depth to the right hand side, but this did not occur until after the action was over. If another platoon plus 3 more anti tank guns had been available, it would have been an ideal position, having depth and adequate coverage of the approaches to the front. The importance of this road block warranted additional infantry troops and anti tank guns.

LESSONS

1. On landing operations, adequate maps should be made available down to the platoon level and should be of a scale large enough to permit the making of detailed plans.
2. To secure maximum coordination in an amphibious landing, a unit should be with all its attachments during the voyage, and together or in close contact during the landing.
3. When operating a 37-mm. gun in a defensive position and the enemy approaches, it is advisable to wait until the armor is between 200 and 400 yards away from your position, opening with rapid fire.
4. When the anti tank platoon is in the defense, the sound-power telephones within the platoon should be ^{used} installed with the least practicable delay after occupying the position.
5. The individual soldier should continually be conscious of the cover and concealment of himself and the crew-serviced weapons in his squad.
6. Continual precautions should be taken in connection with

the use of the password, always giving it in as low a tone of voice as possible.

7. When the area to be covered is large, sufficient forces should be assigned this area to permit having adequate coverage of the front and depth of the position.

L O A D I N G C H A R T

TRANSDIV. 18 (Combat Team 18)

SHIP:

PRINCIPAL ASSAULT UNIT:

HMS. ROYAL ULSTERMAN)
HMS. ULSTER MONARCH }
HMS. ROYAL SCOTSMAN }

1st Ranger Battalion

HMS. REINA DEL PACIFICO)

Division Headquarters; CT 18
Headquarters; 3d Battalion,
18th Infantry CT.

HMS. TEGELBERG)

2d Battalion, 18th Infantry CT

HMS. ETTRICK)

1st Battalion, 18th Infantry CT

TRANSDIV. 16 (Combat Team 16)

HMS. WARWICK CASTLE)

Division Artillery Headquarters;
CT 16th Inf Headquarters;
3d Battalion, 16th Inf CT

HMS. DUCHESS OF BEDFORD)

1st Battalion, 16th Inf CT;
2d Battalion, 16th Inf CT

TRANSDIV. 26 (Combat Team 26)

HMS. MONARCH OF BERMUDA)

Assistant Division Commander;
Headquarters, CT 26;
2d Battalion, 26th Inf CT

HMS. GLENGYLE)

3d Battalion, 26th Inf CT

HMS. LLANGIBBY CASTLE)

1st Battalion, 26th Inf CT

ORDER OF BATTLE (ORAN AND VICINITY)

1 Battalion	-	2d Regiment ZOUAVES
6 Squadrons	-	2d Regiment Chasseurs d'Afrique
3 Batteries	-	66th Artillerie d'Afrique
1 Battery	-	Group Autonome Artillerie Metropolitaine du Levant
8 Batteries	-	411th Regiment Defense Countre Aerunets